Plum Brook Station Open House

PUTTING OUT THE WELCOME MAT

BY S. JENISE VERIS

***PLUM BROOK STATION** opened its gates and lines of communication to nearly 4300 neighbors and curiosity-seekers who participated in Open House activities and tours held October 30. The event highlighted the size and significance of projects tested in the four world-class facilities at the NASA Glenn field station and to learn about the history and pending decommissioning of its nuclear reactor* *(see page 8).*

"The Open House was an outstanding success," said Plum Brook Station Manager Robert Kozar. "The public had the opportunity to experience NASA's presence and importance in Northeast Ohio."

"It's really amazing. I never realized how big it was, until they compared it to the size of Maumee, then I said, 'Whoa!'"
—Lisa Molihan, Sandusky


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"The astronaut (Mike Foreman) was a bit hit with the parents and children. Although the lines grew long, no one seemed to mind because of his attentiveness to each one."
—Don Costello, Strongsville

"We came to investigate the noisy thing that drives us crazy every so often. We discovered it's the HTF when they run the steam ejector. There's a whole lot more going on here than we thought."
—Don and Pricilla Adams & Family, Sandusky

"It's neat to know that we have something this big and important closeby...it's a great place to bring students for field trips."
—Linda and Allen Brosser, Bellview


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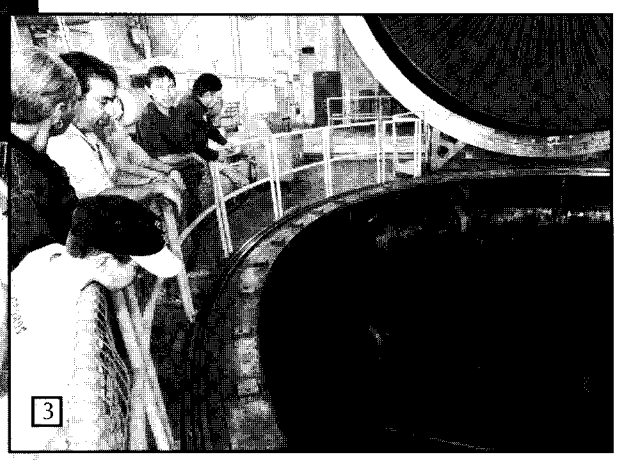
"I was curious to see how they [NASA] tested missiles because I used to make the liquid nitrogen and liquid oxygen for the Air Force missiles while doing a tour of duty in Toranto, Italy.
—Harold Throne, Sandusky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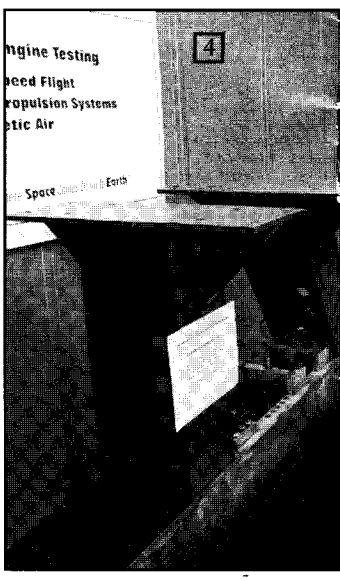

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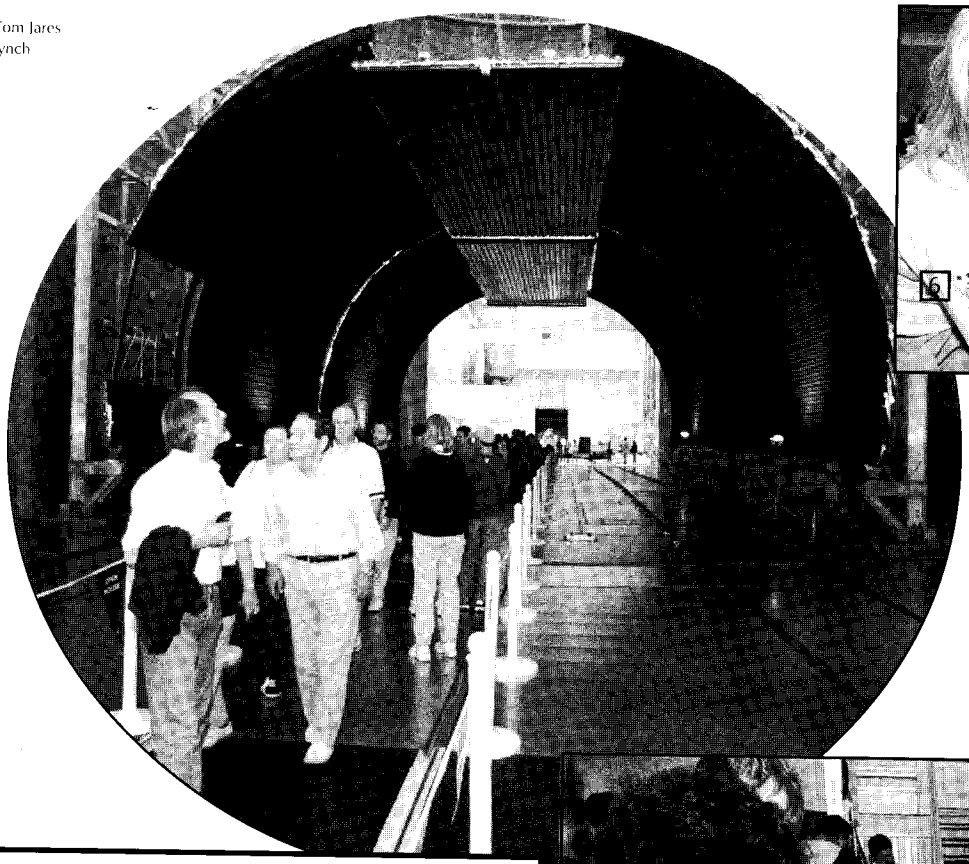
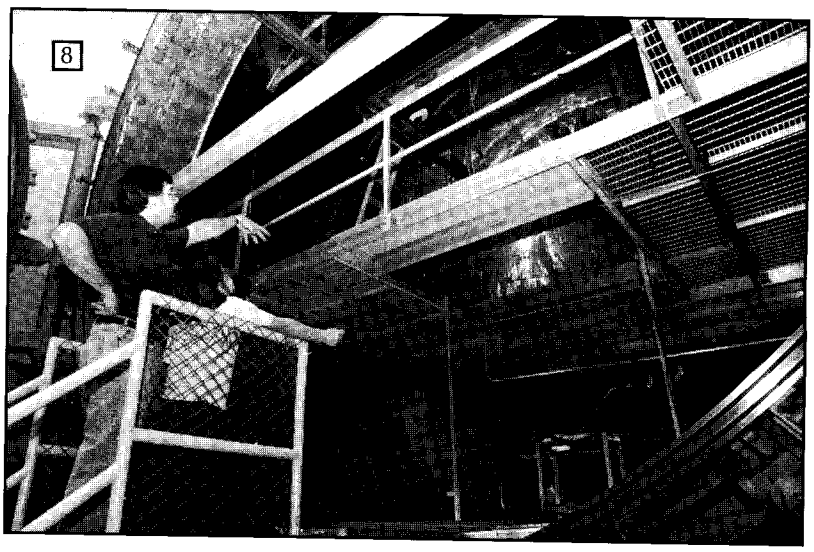
Photos by Tom Jares and Chris Lynch



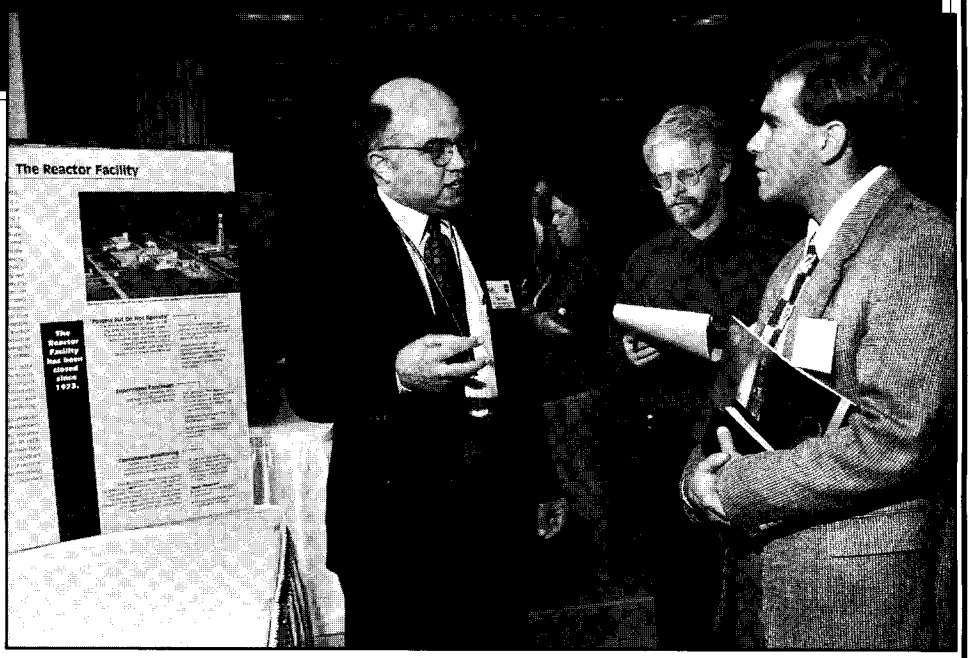
"We didn't know what to expect, but was happy to see that there is so much for the kids. The kids really liked the fizz rockets in the Space Power Facility."
—Jim Meyer and Tom Meyer, Norwalk

Photo Captions: 1) Hank Pfanner (right) explains the Space Propulsion Research Facility (SPRF) display to Yvemarie Jones of WNWO-TV in Toledo during the Media Tour. 2) Astronaut Mike Foreman signs autographs. 3) Guests peer into the test chamber of the B-2 rocket test facility. 4) From the safety of the B-Control Room, Michael Bower discusses testing procedures for the Hypersonic Tunnel Facility (off limits for the day) using a model of Space Plane. 5) Visitors enter the test chamber of the Space Power Facility (SPF). 6 & 7) In the SPF, activity tables awaited children and adults alike. 8) Guests look at the Cryogenic Propellant Tank Facility.

"There's a lot more to this place than the giant golf ball (SPF dome) that I see from the highway."
—Molly Rilley, Sandusky



Decommissioning Plum Brook's Reactor Facility



During the Media Tour at Plum Brook on October 29, Tim Polich (left), Glenn's decommissioning project manager, explained plans for the decommissioning of two idle nuclear reactors in the Reactor Facility to media in attendence. John Mangels of *The Plain Dealer* (center) and Tim Kelly of WKFM, Sandusky, are pictured with Polich.

DURING Plum Brook Station's Open House (Oct. 30) and Media Tour (Oct. 29), guests had opportunities to learn more about plans for decommissioning two idle nuclear reactors, which are located in the closed Reactor Facility.

In 1962, NASA began operating the reactors—a 60-megawatt nuclear reactor and a 100-kilowatt mock-up reactor—under a license agreement with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The reactors, referred to as non-power reactors, were built to study the effects of radiation on materials used in space flight (not to provide energy for utilities).

Plum Brook's Reactor Facility, which is located on 27 acres about a half mile from the Station's northern fence line boundary, made many contributions to the advancement of aerospace and flight technology over the 11 years (1962-1973) the reactors were in operation. When NASA was faced with budget reductions in 1973, the Agency shut down the reactors. The fuel from the reactor was safely removed to a U.S. Department of Energy facility in Idaho. Since then, the closed Reactor Facility has been in safe, dry, and secure storage, held under a "Possess But Do Not Operate " license agreement with the NRC. The facility has been continuously monitored and maintained since 1973.

"Decommissioning the Reactor Facility makes sense especially with today's advanced decommissioning technologies and the existence of approved safe disposal facilities for low-level radioactive waste," said Bill Wessel, Glenn's director of Safety and Assurance Technologies. "We want to clean up the area once and for all, and we intend to do it in the most thorough and safest way possible."

Tim Polich, Glenn's decommissioning project manager, and a team of experts have evaluated several alternative methods to safely decommission the facility.

"Public safety is NASA Glenn's number one concern," Polich said. "Our goal is to minimize risk to the public by reducing residual radiation to levels that would be safe enough to use the site for any other purpose in the future."

Decommissioning involves two steps. Step one is removal and disposal of all radioactive components and materials. Roughly 90% of the radioactivity is contained within the reactor tank and the dry storage area. The remaining radioactivity is contained primarily within existing piping and equipment in identified locations. Step two involves cleanup of any radioactivity that may remain in the buildings and on the site.

A decommissioning plan will be submitted to the NRC by the end of 1999. The NRC has 12-18 months to review and approve the plan. Total decommissioning is expected by 2007. NASA's license with the NRC will be terminated only after the NRC has conducted an extensive radiological survey of the entire area. Results of that survey will be used to certify that levels of radioactivity are considered safe.

Glenn is committed to keeping the Erie County community informed of the decommissioning process as it progresses over the next several years. In addition to the Media Tour and public Open House, Plum Brook representatives held a community information session on November 3. A Community Work Group has been formed to keep the lines of communication open between NASA and the community. ◆